



INTERIOR DESIGN BY PATTI WOODS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER VITALE

ARCHITECTURE BY BATES CORKERN STUDIO
WRITTEN BY ANDREW MYERS

You've got to find me a house — and soon." That urgent request came from a long-time client to designer Patti Woods. What resulted is a crisp and clean modern bachelor's home in Mountain Brook, a verdant suburb of Birmingham, Alabama.

Fortunately, Woods was uniquely suited to execute the call's directive. She had worked with the client, an entrepreneur in his forties, on a previous home as well as a lake house — both turnkey projects where Woods was entrusted to pick surface materials, furnishings, and art.

Then there is the designer's ability as a house and client whisperer. "I'm very intuitive and have great spatial imagination. I can move walls, raise ceilings, and change paint colors in my head," says Woods, who before founding Birmingham-based Patti Woods Interiors in 2008 was a graphic artist, albeit one who "had had all these ideas about furniture, textiles, and floor plans, but I just didn't realize where they all pointed."

Friends helped set her on the course. "In just a very informal way, I would work on a friend's beach house or stage a party," explains Woods, who credits not only intuition, but also curiosity and empathy as the tools that allow her to divine a client's taste and lifestyle. "There's an interpretive, psychological component," she says, likening

A DESIGNER and an ARCHITECT move walls, floors, and ceilings to TRANSFORM a dark house into a home filled with LIGHT

TEAM EFFORT



Previous pages: Designer Patti Woods found a bright solution for the dining room of a house in Birmingham, Alabama. A metal-and-walnut dining table by Holly Hunt is surrounded by comfortable upholstered wing chairs from Lee Industries. The painting is from Geber Contemporary in Santa Fe. These pages: Positioned in front of a linen Verellen sofa is an antique stone-topped table and a pair of Jiun Ho Mopane chairs.



the process to that of a set designer. “You get into the characters and then create their spaces.”

Another decorative compass point that set her off in the right direction was her husband. A residential contractor, he would often ask Woods to consult informally and discreetly on projects in which the clients didn’t want, or think they needed, a designer. Such was how she finally found her professional true north. “My husband had clients who were adamant about ‘no decorator,’ but he was very concerned about the project’s next phase,” says Woods. “So I walked the space, pulled images and paint colors, and said, ‘Just give them these.’” The clients’ response was to hire her immediately.

Woods experienced a nearly identical sequence of events with her Mountain Brook client. Initially averse to working with a designer, he first hired her to help him feather an interim nest, and then, in short order, to create the nest in its full-fledged entirety. “There was a huge level of trust, which has only grown,” says Woods.

That’s not to say that the client immediately subscribed to Woods’ point of view regarding this particular abode, which she describes as having been a “total mess,” a vaguely Southwestern concept grafted onto a modern house. The unfortunate hybrid was a confusing mix of spaces marked by four different flooring materials, rooms divided at whim into smaller rooms complemented by even smaller doorways, and wood moldings stained dark as if to reinforce a motif of gloom. To make matters worse, the

home was sited with no relation to the property’s striking topography and stunning views.

“Really we should have torn the house down,” says architect Jeremy Corkern, of Birmingham’s Bates Corkern Studio, who was brought on to the project at Woods’ recommendation, adding that what had started out as a great midcentury had degenerated to Mexican Mediterranean. “Initially, I think the plan was to paint, move a few walls, and sell it.”

Woods and Corkern’s solution was simplicity itself. “We imagined it as a Malibu beach house — white, pristine, classically pure in form, open, airy and artful and marrying indoors with out,” says Woods, explaining that the well-traveled client, who had spent a portion of his childhood in Newport Beach, understood the goal immediately. Her interior scheme was all about an emphasis on light. “White walls hitting the floor with no baseboards or trim, waxed bleached oak floors throughout. The simpler and cleaner, the better,” she says.

To turn that vision into reality, Corkern drew on lessons he’d learned as a teenage protégé of A. Hays Town, an acclaimed Southern architect known for his ability to update traditional architecture without losing its integrity.

Working with architect Thomas Paul Bates, Corkern focused on creating axial alignments, both within rooms and between rooms, with sightlines often leading to the landscape. He installed ceiling beams, corrected arches, and removed superfluous additions such as the fake

Previous pages: The breakfast bay, between the kitchen and living room, is the designer’s favorite perch. Alongside the custom settee in taupe mohair, iconic modern pieces — Eero Saarinen’s oval tulip table and Harry Bertoia’s mesh metal chairs — help keep things light. The Lucerne Hanging Lamp is by Holly Hunt. Sheer panels of Holly Hunt Great Plains fabric complement the steel-and-glass custom doors and windows. Right: Custom-designed kitchen cabinetry is one-quarter sewn white oak. Appliances include a Sub-Zero refrigerator and Wolf range. The barstools are by Design Within Reach.

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Oly lamps sit on each side of a custom upholstered bed made up in Kelly Wearstler bedding. Other calming elements include an antique walnut chest and Konya rug adorned with medallions.



fireplace that divided living room and kitchen. He also thickened walls and installed steel and glass doors along with leaded windows to underscore the home's new scale. Corkern then added several skylights with round leaded windows that can be opened — a nod, he explains, to the late, great classical Midwest architect David Adler.

Outside, the scope of his work appeared as big as the view. Outdoor spaces, including a media room, were added, along with a 55-foot-long infinity pool and spa. “We created an enormous parapet wall, four large columns, a grid, an arbor. The whole idea was to lift the eye to make the rear elevation in proportion

and scale with the view,” Corkern says, explaining that the rhythmic aspects were inspired by the Alhambra, a palace and fortress in Spain. And the exterior color, white, served to emphasize the house's regained sculptural form while making the transition from outside to inside visually seamless. “We're sort of known for our houses being primarily white,” he adds.

The result? “It's a house you want to linger in, that's what I hear from everyone who's been there,” says Woods. It's a sentiment shared by the owner, who recently asked Woods to increase the place settings from twelve to thirty. ■

Above: The outdoor media room is furnished with a pair of Belgian outdoor sofas covered in Perennials natural linen weave fabric. Positioned to each side sit armless teak chairs in chocolate from Design Within Reach. A circa-1710 Portuguese buffet *deux corps* with original paint anchors the wall. Right: The stainless-steel outdoor kitchen and bar feature lighting by The Urban Electric Co. and the Big Green Egg grill.

